

LEBANON/CIVIL
CONFLICT

ROBINSON: Good evening. President Reagan is considering new measures to protect the lives of American soldiers on the ground and just off the coast of Lebanon. As White House correspondent Sam Donaldson reports, those new measures include a possible first strike against terrorists.

DONALDSON: A senior administration official hinted today that President Reagan is considering a preemptive military strike against terrorist bases that could launch aerial attacks on U.S. naval and Marine personnel in the Mediterranean. The official confirmed that U.S. forces there have gone to a higher level of readiness in recent days because of a threat from aerial kamikaze attacks. The official said Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups sponsored by Iran and acting with the acquiescence of Syria have acquired aircraft capable of carrying large amounts of explosives--'flying bombs,' the official called them. The official said the aircraft have been moved closer to U.S. forces in recent days but have not yet been married-up with Iranian-trained pilots. Presumably if intelligence sources can report that has not occurred, they can also report when it does, and said the official, when asked about the possibility of a preemptive strike to neutralize the threat, 'That thought has occurred to us.' The official said the terrorist air bases are not located on Syrian territory, but no matter where they are, a preemptive strike would go beyond the current policy of firing back when fired upon and would further draw the United States into the Lebanese conflict. Sam Donaldson, ABC News, the White House.